

Migrating Musical Myths

The Case of the Libyan Aulos

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Abstract

Allusions to the 'Libyan *aulos*' or 'Libyan *lōtos*' are quite common in Euripides, but occur nowhere in earlier texts and only sporadically later. The identity of the instrument to which these unusual expressions refer is something of a mystery. I argue that it cannot be a special kind of instrument distinct from the familiar *aulos*, but that the designation reflects a mythological tradition, difficult but by no means impossible to trace in our sources, according to which the *aulos* and its music originated in North Africa rather than in Phrygia, where the more familiar legends locate it.

Keywords

aulos – *lōtos* – Euripides – Libya – Phrygia – Greek myths – M.L. West

I'm acutely aware that being asked to deliver the first of these lectures in memory of Martin West is a considerable honour, and I'm duly grateful for the implication that I'm a fit person to do it.¹ But at the same time the actual presentation of it is a pretty daunting task. Not only am I addressing an audience consisting largely of highly accomplished classicists who can be expected to distinguish dross from gold; I am also standing squarely in the shadow of one of the most distinguished classical scholars the world has seen since the

1 This essay was presented (Oxford, 2 March 2017) as the inaugural Martin West Memorial Lecture. I have eliminated one or two inelegant phrases, but apart from that, in the belief that readers of this journal might like to see the piece in its original form, I have not altered the text I delivered on that occasion. Nor have I embroidered it with clusters of references to scholarly literature which, when I wrote the paper, I had not in fact read.

beginning of the 20th century. I cannot hope to emulate the penetrating acuity of his scholarship, the extraordinary range of his interests, knowledge and expertise, his remarkable interpretative insight, his often beguiling and sometimes devastating deployment of the English language, or indeed any of the other skills which he put to such admirable use.

But Professor West is no longer with us, and for this evening you will have to put up with me instead. My project is not to celebrate his work by passing his achievements and publications in review; many of you knew him better than I did, and I've no doubt that most of you have studied a substantial number of his publications and formed your own opinions about them. I shall seek to honour his memory in another way, by offering a few thoughts of my own on a puzzle that arises in one of his main areas of interest, that of Greek music. No matter how he might have reacted to my proposals, I'm sure he would have agreed that while the puzzle itself is hardly of earth-shattering importance, it's an intriguing little conundrum and deserves at least a modest dose of scholarly attention.

I can't resist starting, however, with a side-glance at an article of his that was published posthumously, at the end of last year, in an issue of the Italian journal *Eikasmós* (West 2016). Though it appeared so recently, it is in fact the unrevised text of a paper he presented at two conferences in 2011, and it encapsulates, with West's characteristic combination of erudition, close reasoning, constructive imagination and wit, some of the main themes and arguments of the book on the *Odyssey* that he published three years later (West 2014). The central contention of the article, which is called 'Odysseus re-routed', is that in the course of the *Odyssey's* composition, the poet changed his mind about some of its major features; and in particular that he transferred the bulk of Odysseus' adventures from the Eastern Mediterranean, where he had originally located them, to little-known regions in the far West, at the same time adding to them a collection of episodes derived from the legend of Jason and the Argonauts, whose traditional location, from a Greek perspective, was in the North or North-East, in the area of the Black Sea.

I mention this only because, by coincidence or otherwise, something rather similar seems to have happened—or so I shall try to persuade you—in the case that I want to discuss, in which the two central characters are Euripides and a musical instrument. There's nothing unusual about a Euripidean reference to an instrument, simply as such; in the course of his tragedies he scatters musical allusions, and allusions to instruments in particular, more lavishly, I think, than any other poet of the period, with the possible exception of Pindar. And it's no surprise, either, that the instruments that appear most often in his plays are *auloi*. These double-reed pipes, always played in pairs, were capable of a

remarkable repertoire of tonal variations and expressive effects, not to mention a considerable volume of sound; their music could stimulate emotions ranging from desolate grief to joyful merriment, from terror to relaxed conviviality; they could induce religious frenzy or quasi-magical trance, or sound the marching-tune for troops going into battle. They were the staple instruments of musical entertainment at symposia, and in informal dancing and general jollification; they were integral to a multitude of religious ceremonies; they were the regular accompanying instruments for almost every genre of public song and dance, including of course the songs and dances of tragedy and comedy; and they were the protagonists of the only genre of purely instrumental public music that achieved significant status in Greek culture, the colourful and dramatic *aulētikos nomos* most famously performed in the Pythian games at Delphi. In short, the *auloi* were a prominent and essential presence in Greek life, and their expressive and affective powers lent themselves very naturally to exploitation as points of reference by speakers and singers on the tragic stage.

But Euripides gives some of his references to the *aulos* an unexpected twist by presenting it with a geographical epithet, calling it the Libyan *aulos* or—equivalently—the Libyan *lōtos*, or sometimes simply the *lōtos*, a designation in which the epithet ‘Libyan’ is certainly implied. The name *lōtos* itself need not detain us long, and the Libyan associations of things called *lōtoi* need no elaborate explanation either. Theophrastus gives us the information, in his *Historia plantarum* (4.3.1-3), that *lōtos* is the name of a tree whose finest and most numerous specimens grow in Libya (4.3.1), and from whose wood *auloi* and other things were made (4.3.4). In another passage (4.2.5) he says that its wood is dark-coloured, strong and attractive, and is used for making statues, and miniature tables and beds. The tree in question is probably *Celtis australis*, whose wood—according to information I’ve gathered from various websites—is tough, pliable, durable and widely used by wood-turners; it is indeed sometimes used for modern reproductions of the ancient *auloi*, including some in the formidable organological arsenal of Stefan Hagel in Vienna, admirable instruments which I have seen and heard him play on many occasions. The practice of naming the instrument itself by calling it the *lōtos* is again unproblematic; it is paralleled in the ways in which other instruments are quite commonly designated, as when a rustic pipe or a *syrinx* is called “the reed”, *kalamos*, or when Euripides calls cymbals “the bronze”, *chalkos* (*Hel.* 1346). If there was a wind instrument that came from Libya, there would therefore be nothing to puzzle us in the fact that it was sometimes designated as the *lōtos*.

But these ways of indicating the instrument pose several difficult problems. To begin with, there are no references to it by these names in Greek literature before Euripides himself, and remarkably few even in later writings. If such

designations turned up only once or twice in his plays, or only in one short period of his output, we might dismiss them as no more than a passing quirk and leave it at that, but this is not the case. If we put together the three forms of reference, Libyan *aulos*, Libyan *lōtos* and *lōtos* unqualified, there are thirteen instances in all; the first is in his *Alcestis*, which was produced on the Athenian stage in 438 BC, and the rest are scattered among a total of ten different plays throughout the remaining 30 years of his career, right down to the *Iphigenia in Aulis* of about 406 BC, the year in which he is thought to have died.² No other writer uses any of the relevant expressions in any surviving Greek literature until the end of the fourth century; after that they appear from time to time, but only very occasionally, in poems and other writings of various sorts, including the two famous paeans by Athenian composers that were performed at Delphi in the late 2nd century BC, and whose words and music were inscribed there, on the wall of the Athenian treasury (they are now in the Delphi Museum).³ Yet despite the fact that no other contemporary, precursor or immediate successor of Euripides is known to have used the expressions 'Libyan *aulos*', 'Libyan *lōtos*' or unadorned '*lōtos*' to refer to an instrument, Euripides seems to assume that they would be immediately understood and needed no explanation. He writes as though the names were already in common use, or at least as though everyone in his audience would know what he meant by them, and would recognise why it was appropriate to refer to the instruments they designate in these ways, at the points in the plays where they are mentioned. If we are to explain their appearance in Euripides' tragedies, one thing we must take into account is the fact that despite the absence of any earlier references, Euripides' audiences must have been in a position to understand the expressions he uses.

As a first, very simple and reductive explanation of these facts, we might guess that some special kind of *aulos* had in fact been introduced into Greece from North Africa shortly after the middle of the fifth century, that it had distinctive and easily recognisable features, and that it had enough success to impress itself on general public consciousness, first, perhaps, in Athens and later elsewhere. But this hypothesis faces difficulties which I think are insuperable. In the first place, leaving Euripides on one side, there is absolutely no evidence for the introduction of any such instrument around the time in question. Secondly, when later scholars, specifically Athenaeus (182d-e) and Pollux (4.74), try to identify the so-called Libyan *lōtos* or *aulos*, they assign the

2 The complete list: *Alc.* 346f., *Tr.* 544, *HF* 11 and 684, *Heracl.* 892, *El.* 716, *Ph.* 787, *Hel.* 170, *Ba.* 160 and 687, *IA* 438 and 1036, *Erechth.* fr. 370,8 K.

3 Pöhlmann-West 2001, no's 20f.

name to an instrument that is most unlikely to be the one that Euripides had in mind. It is the transverse pipe also called the *plagiaulos* or *phōtinx*, specifically the kind commonly played in Egypt, which seems not have been a reed instrument at all but a variety of flute. Such instruments do not appear to have had any public profile in fifth-century Greece, and it is in the last degree improbable that they would have been thought appropriate to the contexts in which Euripides' allusions occur—I'll say a bit more about those contexts in a moment. The same passage of Pollux attributes the invention of another kind of *aulos* to the Libyans too, but that is an even less plausible candidate: it is the *hippophorbos aulos*, which was used by the Libyan 'tent-dwellers' or nomads to call their horses. Pollux says that it was made from a stick of the tree called *daphnē* with the bark removed and the pith extracted, and that it makes a high-pitched *ēchos*. It was evidently a very primitive instrument, perhaps just a simple whistle.

The hypothesis of a recently introduced instrument, with striking features that marked it off clearly from the *auloi* already familiar in the Greek world, is further discouraged, and the whole situation made even more puzzling, by the fact that Euripides gives no indication that the instrument he mentions has any specifically Libyan features which distinguish it from the general run of *auloi*. Nor does it seem from his allusions that it is used in contexts of some special sort, or that the quality of its sound was in any way exceptional; on the contrary, Euripides uses one or other of the expressions we are considering in the *majority* of his references to the *aulos*, with thirteen occurrences against only eight in which it is *not* called either Libyan or 'the *lōtos*' or both; and this suggests quite strongly that the expressions refer to instruments of a perfectly normal type. So far as we can tell, the names are being used to refer to the ordinary *aulos* which had already been central to Greek music-making for at least two hundred years.

Just about any of Euripides' allusions could be used to illustrate these points, but let's take the least well known of the passages in which such references appear, a fragment of his *Erechtheus* (fr. 370,8 K.). The Chorus, evidently made up of old Athenian men, sees a messenger coming from the battlefield where Erechtheus and his army have been fighting the army of Eleusis. They wonder whether the news will be good, so that if it is they can sing songs of victory around the city with the sounds of the Libyan *lōtos* and the *kithara*, followed by dancing maidens. The epithet 'Libyan' seems to serve no identifiable purpose here at all, and there's apparently no reason why this *lōtos* should not be an *aulos* of the familiar sort, which is regularly mentioned in other passages in tragedy where celebrations of these kinds are described. Much the same is true of all the other references in his plays. In the *Alcestis*, for instance, the Libyan

lōtos accompanies exclamations of joy; in the *Herakles*, as in the *Erechtheus*, it accompanies songs of victory; in the *Troades* it is associated with joyful singing, and in *Iphigenia Aulidensis* it accompanies the songs and dances at a wedding. These passages might tempt us to suppose that it is particularly suited to scenes of happy celebration; but this is at odds with the reference in the *Helen*, where the sorrowful Helen calls on the Sirens to bring the Libyan *lōtos* to accompany her lamentation. At *Bacchae* 160 it is involved in the rituals of Dionysus, as the *aulos* is often elsewhere, and at *Bacchae* 687 the misguided and straight-laced Pentheus links it with wild behaviour, drinking and unbridled sexuality. There is nothing unusual about any of this. All the situations evoked are ones where the instrument we would expect is the familiar Greek *aulos*, which appears in these contexts in all relevant non-Euripidean writings of the period, and indeed in other passages of Euripides himself.

Another hypothesis might be that Euripides was prompted to use the name by the geographical locations of the scenes in which the instrument is mentioned. But this suggestion also fails. The *Erechtheus* is set in Athens, as we have seen; and with one exception, the *Helen*, which is set in Egypt, none of the regions in which the action of the relevant plays takes place is anywhere near Libya. One of them, the *Troades*, is in fact set at Troy, that is, in Phrygia, the country with which the *aulos* was most strongly and consistently associated, and the relevant verses in that play are doubly peculiar, since they couple the Libyan allusion with an explicit reference to Phrygia. Describing what happened when the wooden horse was dragged into the city, the Chorus sings that “the Libyan *lōtos* and Phrygian songs rang out, and maidens sang with a joyful cry to the beat of their high-stepping feet” (*Tr.* 544-6). The impression we get is of stereotypical Phrygian music with vigorous singing and dancing to the sound of the *aulos*; but in that case, why is their instrument called ‘Libyan’? It seems not just odd but positively perverse.

The strangeness of Euripides’ expressions, if indeed they are simply intended to designate the ordinary *aulos* by a different name, stems of course from the fact I have just mentioned, that according to a multitude of sources, the *aulos* is a Phrygian instrument; it was invented in Phrygia and came from there to Greece, and as Aristotle says (*Pol.* 1342a32-b6), it has especially close affinities with Phrygian music. In the legends we have the story of Athena, who devised the *aulos* and then threw it away in disgust, and the Phrygian satyr Marsyas who found the instrument that Athena had rejected and taught himself to play it—leading on, of course, to the tale of the contest between Marsyas with his pipes and Apollo with his lyre, in which Apollo, inevitably, was victorious (according to some accounts because he cheated). All these legends are consistently set in Phrygia; and in reports that have some claim to be treated as

historical, or at least as attempts at history, the instrument and its music were brought to Greece by the Phrygian aulete Olympus, whom the mythographers represent as the pupil of Marsyas himself.⁴ Allusions to the *aulos* as ‘Phrygian’ appear in innumerable sources, and its associations with Phrygian music are repeatedly emphasised. I won’t bore you by citing relevant texts; all that is very familiar territory.

There are a few writers, however, who flatly contradict the usual accounts, and assert that the *aulos* was actually *invented* by the Libyans. The earliest clear example of this assertion is in a snippet quoted by Athenaeus from the work *On Agathocles* by Duris of Samos, a historian whose life spanned the late fourth century and the early third. It might also be regarded as the most authoritative example, since it comes from a historian rather than a poet, who is trying—or so we might suppose—to tell us something that is actually true. Modern scholars, however, tend to treat Duris with suspicion, usually on the grounds that he is less concerned to record facts than to purvey Samian propaganda. In this case—at least as far as I can see—Samos and Samian chauvinism are not involved, but there may well be other reasons for doubting that what he says is true; on the other hand truth, as we shall see, is not really the issue. The question is rather whether what he says is pure invention, or whether he is drawing on a tradition that already existed.

What he is doing, at any rate, is offering an explanation for the usage that we find in Euripides. Taken at face value, what Duris says implies that it was characteristic of other poets too; I’m not convinced that we should take the implication seriously but in the absence of further evidence that’s an issue which we’d better leave on one side. At any rate, this is what he says. “The poets call the *aulos* ‘Libyan’ because Seirites, who was apparently the first inventor of *aulos*-music, was a Libyan, one of the Nomades; and he was also the first to play the *Mētrōia* on the *aulos*” (Duris fr. 34 Müller, quoted at Athenaeus 14.618b-c). Now there may be some confusion here, since ‘Seirites’ appears in no other text as the name of a Libyan musician or of anyone else. In other sources it is not the name of an individual person but that of a Semitic people; and they lived in the Sinai peninsular, not in Libya. They are indeed mentioned in the Old Testament, and were known, among other things, for having devised the first alphabetic script. But the name is unimportant. What seems extraordinary about Duris’ account is that it plainly contradicts a well entrenched tradition about the origins of the *aulos*, that is, the tradition which places its invention in Phrygia.

If Duris is challenging a firmly established belief, we should try to work out what grounds he could have had for asserting his unorthodox view. It’s worth

4 E.g. [Plut.] *Mus.* 5, 1132f.

noticing that his account goes beyond the mere statement that the *aulos* was a Libyan invention; he not only names the supposed inventor of the *aulos* and specifies the tribe to which he belonged, but also asserts that he was the first performer of the musical pieces called *Mētrōia*. But the word means ‘pieces of music for the Mother Goddess’, and in the usual tradition these too are emphatically Phrygian, dedicated to the Mountain Mother, the Phrygian goddess Cybele. According to reports in the Ps.-Plutarchan *De musica*—reports which may have come from Aristoxenus—they were among the compositions of Olympus, the archetypal Phrygian musician (1137d, cf. 1141b). It looks as if Duris is implicitly claiming for his Libyan *prōtos heuretēs* everything that the regular historians had credited to Olympus.

Before tackling the problem directly, I need to make a point about the Olympus tradition itself. Sometimes, as I’ve said, he is intimately linked with figures of legend, that is, with Marsyas and Athena, and sometimes he is located historically, as for instance in the Ps.-Plutarchan *De musica*, on the authority of Aristoxenus.⁵ Now we know that the Greeks often made no sharp distinction between history and myth; but it’s also true that some writers of the fifth and later centuries seem to have deliberately reinterpreted or reinvented mythological characters and stories, and introduced them into supposedly historical narratives. This is what happened, I think, in the case of Olympus. In the earlier accounts he was associated with Marsyas; but when educated Greeks began to distinguish history from legend, some of them—impressed, perhaps, by the fact that music attributed to Olympus was still well known in their own time—looked for ways of extracting him from the mythological context. This may be the origin of the suggestion that there were two musicians of that name, a more ancient Olympus who belongs to the legends, and a younger Olympus who could be treated as the composer of the familiar melodies. The first person we know of who propounded this idea is Pratinas in the fifth century, who asserted, we are told, that the younger Olympus was responsible for composing a piece for the *auloi* called the *Polykephalos nomos* (*PMG* 713(i) *ap.* [Plut.] *Mus.* 1133d-3). In Plato’s *Symposium* (215b-c) Alcibiades in effect insists on returning to the mythological version, asserting that Olympus was taught the art of *aulos*-playing by Marsyas, and that the tunes credited to Olympus were really those of his teacher. In a little while I’ll give an example of an attempt on a much larger scale to historicise tales that had started out as myth.

I suspect, then, that when Duris produced his purportedly historical account of the Libyan origins of the *aulos*, he was going to work in much the same way as Pratinas. That is, if he had any grounds at all for his contentions, they came

5 In addition to the references given above, most notably in 1134f-1135b.

from a pre-existing tradition parallel to the familiar one, a tradition that belonged to the world of the myths, and which, when reinterpreted as history, would challenge the primacy of Phrygia in the development of *aulos*-music and transfer this status to Libya. But when put baldly like that, this suggestion of a pre-existing myth is the merest hypothesis. The important question will be whether we can confirm it, or at least give it some solid support, by finding traces of such a myth in the surviving literature.

At first sight the prospect of finding such a myth seems unpromising, since as I said at the beginning, Euripides is the first writer to use the word 'Libyan' in connection with the *aulos*. That remains true; but I want to suggest that there are quite persuasive reasons for thinking that the tradition on which he is drawing does indeed go back to a substantially earlier date. The immediate evidence is in Pindar's 12th *Pythian Ode*, first performed in either 490 or 486 BC (about fifty years before Euripides' *Alcestis*), which celebrates among other things the invention of the *aulos*. As in most other versions of the story, it was invented by Athena; but this is not the familiar tale of Athena and the satyr Marsyas. *Pythian* 12 describes Athena as having invented the art in which Midas of Acragas has been victorious in the contest at Delphi, that is, the art of playing the *aulos*; and it tells us, specifically, that she devised a melody for *auloi* called the 'Nomos of Many Heads'—that is, the same *Polykephalos nomos* which Pratinas assigned to Olympus the younger. The melody, Pindar explains, was designed by Athena to celebrate Perseus' killing of the Gorgon Medusa, in which she had assisted him; and it did so by imitating, on the instruments, the dreadful wailing with which Medusa's sisters had greeted her death. Now Pindar, like perhaps the majority of other Greek writers who mention the Gorgons, fails to tell us where they lived and where Medusa was killed; but in a fair number of texts the place is indeed identified. In some versions it is somewhere in the north-east, in the region of the Black Sea; in *PV* 790ff., for instance, the Gorgons live far away towards the sunrise, not far from the land of the gryphons and the Arimaspians. That would not be too obtrusively inconsistent with the Phrygian stories about the origins of the *aulos*. But this was not the commonest view of the matter; in fact it's rather rare. What seems to be the dominant tradition can be traced back to one of cyclic epics, the *Cypria*, and to Hesiod. The *Cypria* places the Gorgons on an island in Okeanos, that is, in the Atlantic Ocean, presumably off the coast of North-west Africa (*Cypria* fr. 32 Bern.), and Hesiod says something very similar; at *Th.* 274f. he tells us that they live "beyond Okeanos, in the farthest region towards Night". In Herodotus we hear that according to the people of Chemmis in Egypt, Perseus was born in their city, and that after growing up in Greece he came back to Egypt "for the reason which the Greeks give, that is, to bring back from Libya

the head of the Gorgon" (2.91). The Libyan location of the story reappears in a fragment of Aeschylus' *Phorcydes* (41A 457a Mette), in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (477), and again in the author who prompted all these questions, that is, in Euripides, who refers to the "race of Libyan Gorgons" at *Ba.* 990; and most later writers adopt the same view. It turns up, in particular, in a passage of Diodorus of Sicily (3.55), in the course of a discussion of Libya which I'll come to in a moment.

If we put all this evidence together, we may think it a reasonable guess that when Euripides and Duris refer to the Libyan *aulos* they are drawing on the same tradition as Pindar. In its mythical form it links the invention of the *aulos* with Athena and with Perseus' slaying of Medusa, which it locates in Libya. The version transmitted by Duris must then be an attempt to translate the myth into historical terms, in which the inventor is an ordinary human being, in just the same way that the Phrygian tradition about the origins of the instrument includes both the myth of Athena and Marsyas, and what was taken to be a piece of sober history, in which the founding father of *aulos* music is a real human being called Olympos. Duris' contention that the *Mētrōia* originated in Libya, with its obvious implication that it did not originate in Phrygia, will also fall into place when we turn to the long passage of Diodorus of Sicily which I mentioned just now, since it stands in a tradition which treats a very substantial block of legendary material that was normally located in Anatolia as belonging in its entirety to Libya.

If the rival tradition linking the *aulos* with the tale of the Gorgons, and hence with Libya, was already familiar in 490 or 486 BC, when Pindar composed *Pythian* 12, there will be no need—or at least a less pressing need—to find a special explanation for the appearance of allusions to the Libyan *aulos* or *lōtos* in Euripides, half a century later, or for his apparent assumption that his audience will immediately understand why he gives the instrument that name. We may wonder why the tradition—in so far as it related to the *aulos*—has left no clearer traces in earlier literature, but of course we must remember that only a tiny proportion of that literature survives. Perhaps Pindar's account of the instrument's invention was already there in the *Cypria*, which contained tales about things supposed to have happened before the Trojan War. That's a perfectly possible hypothesis, but it is also a purely speculative hypothesis; I have no evidence whatever to support it.

But it's worth looking briefly at the block of material together with which the tradition about the Libyan origin of the *aulos* may have marched, though I shall not discuss the passage of Diodorus Siculus in detail. It occupies a long stretch of Book III, running with a few interruptions from chapter 52 to the end of the book in chapter 74. He tells us that its contents are based on a work

by an Alexandrian writer called Dionysius, mysteriously nicknamed Dionysius ‘Skytobrachion’, “Leather-arm”. The project of this Dionysius was to reinterpret ancient myths connected with Libya in historical terms, and the construction he gives them is plainly the product of his own rather wild imagination; it has no real value as history. Nowadays students of ancient history usually dismiss his accounts as worthless, and so from a historical perspective they are; Diodorus expresses doubts about them himself. But this shouldn’t induce us to ignore the fact that Dionysius Skytobrachion would have had nothing to reinterpret if the stories he transformed had not been present in much earlier traditions, in the guise of myth. Some his works were written no later than the middle of the third century BC, as has been established on the basis of a papyrus fragment discovered not long ago (*PHib.* 2.186); and if we assume that he was an adult when he wrote the work from which the papyrus fragment comes, his lifetime must therefore have overlapped with that of Duris, who died in about 260 BC. We thus have two writers of about the same period who were engaged in pretty much the same sort of project.

They were also pursuing very similar agendas, though Dionysius does it on a much grander scale, since both of them were working on legends which locate in Libya events that are usually placed in the north-east, and specifically in Phrygia. The ones with which Dionysius dealt include, for instance, the story of the Argonauts and the tales told about the Amazons; and more relevantly for our purposes, they include also the legends to do with the god Dionysus, and with the goddess known as the Great Mother—that is, in Phrygian terms, Cybele—in whose honour the *Mētrōia* attributed to Olympus (if we follow the Phrygian tradition) or to Seirites (if we follow the Libyan one) were composed and performed. All these myths are normally located in Phrygia, and all of them are now transported to North Africa. Dionysius says he is recounting them in the form in which they are told by the Atlanteans, inhabitants of the lands in the far west of Libya, close to the place in which he also locates the Gorgons.

I am not going to try to summarise his historically rationalised versions of the narratives, though they make mesmerizing reading. It’s perhaps worth mentioning that the musical instruments associated with the Libyan version of the ‘Great Mother’, a title given according to Dionysius to a daughter of the king of the Atlanteans, are just the same as those most prominent in the rituals of Phrygian Cybele. They are the *kymbala* and *tympāna*, and they enter the story in much the same way in both geographical variants. Diodorus goes on immediately to remind us that there is a Phrygian version of the myth, and in chapters 58f. he presents it in a remarkable version which integrates the legend of Cybele with the tale of Marsyas, Athena, the invention of the *aulos* and the contest between Marsyas and Apollo. It’s an ingenious and intriguing

conflation of myths which I commend to your attention, but I'll say no more about it now.

The main point I've been trying to make is that the stories told by Dionysius Skytobrachion are reinterpretations of pre-existing myths, and that they illustrate very vividly the way in which Greek legends, including accounts of the origins of certain kinds of music, are not always consistently located in the same parts of the world. This capacity of the myths for geographical migration provides a useful frame for the conclusions about Euripides' Libyan *lōtos* for which I have been arguing. If I am right, we should resist the temptation to suppose that the Greeks invariably traced the history of the *aulos*, the music of the Cybele cult and the musical rituals of Dionysus to the Anatolian region. That seems to have been the dominant belief, but the rival mythology which located them in the far west of Libya should not be ignored. Most of our direct sources in which myths are transplanted to different parts of the world are relatively late, and these versions of the tales may sometimes be due to nothing but the unrestrained imagination of Hellenistic fantasists. But that is not the situation with Dionysius Skytobrachion, who was not in fact retailing myths at all, but was recasting in historical terms a set of legends that already existed and perhaps had existed for centuries. So far as the origins of the *aulos* are concerned, we have found quite a respectable bundle of evidence suggesting that the Libyan tradition was no less ancient than the Phrygian one.

But even if the hypothesis I've offered is acceptable—and I wouldn't be surprised if you have some doubts about that—some features of the case we might call 'The Mystery of the Libyan *aulos*' remain puzzling. In particular, if the tradition from which it emerged was well known in the Greek world from the time of Pindar's early compositions right down to the death of Euripides—that is, in effect, throughout the fifth century and presumably for a fair stretch of time before and after that—why do we find no trace of it in other fifth-century literature, and what possessed Euripides not merely to use these locutions when no one else does, but to use them as his commonest way of designating the instrument in question, almost, it would appear, as a matter of routine? Did he have special personal, artistic or ideological reasons for buying into the Libyan tradition at the expense of the Phrygian?⁶ We might also ask, similarly, why after some 275 years following the death of Euripides in which this tradition disappears almost completely from view, the expressions suddenly reappear not once but twice in a very public and prominent setting, that is, in both the paeans which two prominent Athenian composers of the

6 By contrast with his thirteen allusions to the 'Libyan' instrument, he refers to *auloi* as 'Phrygian' only twice, at *Ba.* 128 and *IA* 577.

late second century, Athenaios and Limenios, composed for performance at Delphi. These, it seems to me, are questions we can't avoid asking; I on the other hand shall avoid making any attempt to answer them, since I have no idea what the answers could be.

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